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A ROMANIAN TRIBUTE TO SHERMAN KENT

MARIUS SEBE

Whatever the complexities of the puzzles we strive to solve, and whatever the sophisticated techniques we may use to collect the pieces and store them, there can never be a time when the thoughtful man can be supplanted as the intelligence device supreme... Great discoveries are not made by second-rate minds, no matter how they may be juxtaposed organizationally.

Sherman Kent

Introduction

I shall start my paper with a simple question: Why do we need to know and understand the work of Sherman Kent?

In a quick glimpse, my answer is the following: first of all, the Romanian intelligence establishment is looking for a way to meet the challenges of the new millennium, and towards this goal it needs a theory, a doctrine. In fact, we need our own doctrine in the intelligence field, especially given the new geopolitical, geo-economic, and geo-strategic environment of the 21st Century. We have just passed the post-Cold War Era in the 21st Century. Now, the old paradigms of the Cold War are gone, and their place was taken by a new intelligence pattern, governed by new paradigms, raised between the end of the 20th Century and the beginning of the 21st. A second reason might be our need to identify the intelligence roots required for shaping our vision in this field, and especially for elaborating our strategy towards connecting to the future Global Intelligence Community¹. These roots, which should be closely related to knowledge, may be precisely the Romanian contributions to social sciences (S. Haret, D. Gusti,

¹ See the works of ROBERT DAVID STEELE, *President of Open Source Solutions*. Steele presents the idea of Global Intelligence Community in his works, *Europe as Victim, Europe as Leader* http://www.oss.net/extra/document/?module_instance=3&action=show_category&id=43&language_selection=0

A.D. Xenopol etc.), and the international contributions to the intelligence area. To us, that involves determining the best in class in the field, in the past and present, from a theoretical point of view, in order to establish a benchmarking process, enhance our intelligence knowledge, and develop our intelligence capital.

Thus, this paper aims to be a humble Romanian tribute to Sherman Kent. I shall try to present his works and personality. At the same time, I shall let the reader discover the necessity of understanding the value of the intellectual efforts made in the intelligence field, and the importance of this field for a Nation-State, where the decision-makers are supposed to understand and apply rigorously the rules and principles of the strategic intelligence.

Who was Sherman Kent?

Exactly fifty four years ago, a history professor at the Yale University wrote an outstanding book for the American political establishment, and defined a new concept in the American lexicon of national security: *strategic intelligence*. Sherman Kent was one of the architects of the United States Intelligence Community. For nearly two decades, he was at the head of this esteemed machinery. Nowadays, we find that Kent came up with three major contributions to the Intelligence Community: (1) the book *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, which he wrote before entering the Intelligence Community while he was still a history professor at the Yale University; (2) he strove throughout his career to imbue the intelligence field with a sense of professionalism, and as part of this effort he contributed to the establishment of the Central Intelligence Agency's professional journal²; (3) he proposed the foundation of an *Institute for the Advanced Study of Intelligence*, which became reality under the name of *Center for the Study of Intelligence*.

Sherman Kent was born in Chicago, in 1903. He spent much of his childhood in California and Nevada. His father, William Kent, was a congressman elected three times as a California representative, such that Sherman lived in Washington from 1911 to 1919.

After graduating from the Yale University, he received a PhD in history in 1933. Kent's specialization was electoral politics in the 19th-century's Bourbon France. Yale University Press published his first book, *Electoral Procedures under Louis Philippe*, in 1937.

² In "Introduction" to *Sherman Kent and the Board of National Estimates, Collected Essays*, www.odci.gov/csi/books/shermankent/toc.html

After being a historian for all these years, Kent “was rescued from (one suspects) what ultimately would have proved to be an unsatisfying teaching career at Yale by the imminent entry of the United State into World War II”³.

During World War II Kent served in, and became (in January 1943) Chief of the Europe-Africa Division of the Research and Analysis Branch of the Office of Strategic Studies (OSS), a direct predecessor of today’s National Foreign Assessment Center (NFAC) of CIA. His background in history and the intelligence work within OSS were completed as staff of the National War College, before his return to Yale in 1947.

In a single decade Kent accumulated such knowledge and experience that he was able to transform them into “strategic intelligence”. In 1947-1948 he received a Guggenheim Fellowship to write his referential book *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*. The book was printed by Princeton Press, reprinted in 1951, 1953, and published as a revised (paperback) edition in 1966. Talking about this book, Ford believes that it is “certainly the most influential book of its kind yet to appear”⁴. And William Jackson (a former OSS officer himself) said: “it is the best general book so far on any aspect of intelligence; this book should be read by all high officials charged with responsibility for the security of the country and by all those who work in the field of intelligence”⁵.

In late 1950 Kent joined the CIA, to become the deputy chief of the newly created Office of National Estimates (ONE). Before him other civilian specialists joined this structure, and among them William Langer, the Harvard diplomatic historian who was Kent’s superior at the OSS’ Research and Analysis Branch. This movement and others were caused by “the difficulties US Intelligence had had in calling the North Korean invasion of the South in June 1950, and especially the massive Chinese involvement that autumn”⁶, or what Rose called “two strategic intelligence blunders within six months”⁷, both of which lead to a major shake-up of CIA’s analytic process. At the time, the intelligence system of the US didn’t have an analytical entity specialized in producing the national intelligence as a synthesis of the vast, often highly technical, knowledge possessed by the

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ HAROLD P. FORD, *A Tribute to Sherman Kent*, www.odci.gov/csi/books/shermankent/1tribute.html

⁵ WILLIAM H. JACKSON, *New York Times Book Review*, 1 May 1949, in the same article, *A Tribute to Sherman Kent*.

⁶ HAROLD P. FORD, *op.cit.*

⁷ P.K. ROSE, “Perceptions and Reality. Two Strategic Intelligence Mistakes in Korea, 1950”, in *Studies in Intelligence. Journal of the American Intelligence Professional*, 11, 2001, Unclassified Edition.

agencies that made up the U.S. Intelligence Community⁸. That is why, after some intelligence failures and fierce disputes at the higher ranks of the political decision takers, President Truman nominated Lt.Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, US Army, to replace Hillenkoetter as Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), mandating him for a complete overhaul of the agency. “Beetle” Smith brought together Langer and Kent into the Company, to put its analytical house in order. Thus, they were to preside over a reorientation of the analytical components of the CIA⁹.

The result was the Office of National Estimates, with a research arm in the Office of Research and Reports. Langer became the head of the Office of National Estimates and chairman of the Board of National Estimates, which in turn was responsible for producing the NIE’s (National Intelligence Estimates), a new finished form of intelligence. Kent served as Langer’s Deputy until January 1952, when, upon Langer’s return to Harvard, he succeeded Langer as head of ONE. He held that position until 31 December 1967.

What is Strategic Intelligence?

Simply put, this concept is formed by two important concepts of military origin: *strategy* and *intelligence*. Consequently, any study on these subjects requires a military context anchorage.

For the concept of *strategy* we need to get at the root of the military thinking. Strategy means the science or art of military command, as applied to the general planning and conduct of full scale combat operations. Strategy is thus by definition a plan to achieve some given end¹⁰. Other traditional views¹¹ on strategy include:

- Strategy as a coherent and unifying pattern for decision making, a blueprint for a whole organization defining an explicit road map for the future.
- Strategy as a means of defining purpose in terms of long range objectives, actions, programs, and priorities for resource allocation, aligning short term action and resource deployment to be congruent with longer term objectives.

⁸ The term Intelligence Community is used here to describe the collectivity of U.S. Intelligence from World War II onward; this term did not come into use until the mid-1950s or later.

⁹ In “Introduction” to *Sherman Kent and the Board of National Estimates, Collected Essays*, www.odci.gov/csi/books/shermankent/toc.html

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ RICK SIDOROWICZ, *The Concept of Strategy – beyond Strategic Planning*, Competia Inc., <http://www.competia.com/bpubs/Refresher/31-strategicplanning.html>

- Strategy as a response to external opportunities and threats, and to internal strengths and weaknesses, to achieve a long term sustainable competitive advantage; a viable match between internal capabilities and the external environment; and adapting to meet the demands of a changing environment.
- Strategy as a means of defining an organization's competitive domain including defining the business, segmentation and positioning, and how and where it is going to compete.

Now, there is a direct and fundamental link between an organization's strategy and its intelligence activities, since intelligence is:

the knowledge – and, ideally, foreknowledge – sought by nations in response to external threats and to protect their vital interests, especially the well-being of their own people¹².

At the same time, Kent described intelligence as:

the knowledge [and foreknowledge] upon which we base our high-level national policy toward the other states of the world¹³.

This knowledge must meet four tests¹⁴: (a) it must be *complete*; (b) it must be *accurate*; (c) it must be *timely*; (d) it must be “capable of serving as a basis for action”¹⁵. That's why any strategy would have to rely on intelligence that “operates based on three distinct principles”¹⁶: (1) support for senior decision makers in their capacities as strategists; (2) the monitoring and analysis of issues or key topics that matter to strategy; (3) coordination at the corporative center.

On the other hand, defining the *intelligence* concept requires a broader approach, having in mind that “errors of definition lead to errors of strategy”. Because such an approach would require lots of time and space, I will only mention here Warner's successful attempt in this direction, who concludes, after a thorough analysis, that “intelligence is secret, state activity to understand or influence foreign entities”¹⁷.

¹² LYMAN B. KIRKPATRICK, JR., “Intelligence”, in Bruce W. Jentelson and Thomas G. Paterson (eds.), *Encyclopedia of US Foreign Realtions*, 2, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 365.

¹³ SHERMAN KENT, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, Princeton University Press, 1949.

¹⁴ DOUGLAS BERNHARDT, “Strategic Intelligence: the Sword and the Shield of the Enterprise”, in *Competitive Intelligence Magazine*, 5, 5, 2002.

¹⁵ SHERMAN KENT, *op.cit.*

¹⁶ Corporate Executive Board, 2000 – *Strategic Intelligence: Providing Critical Information for Strategic Decisions*. Washington, DC: Corporate Strategy Board, in DOUGLAS BERNHARDT, *art.cit.*

¹⁷ MICHAEL WARNER, “Understanding Our Craft. Wanted: A Definition of Intelligence”, in *Studies in Intelligence, Journal of the American Intelligence Professional*, 46, 3, 2002, Unclassified Edition.

Strategic Intelligence was viewed by Kent as a triple of intelligence definitions:

- Intelligence is knowledge – the knowledge our state must possess regarding other states in order to assure itself that its cause will not suffer nor its undertakings fail because its statesman and soldiers plan and act in ignorance.
- Intelligence is organization – intelligence is an institution; it is a physical organization of living people which pursues the special kind of knowledge at issue.
- Intelligence is activity – the word intelligence is used not merely to designate the types of knowledge I have been discussing and the organization to produce this knowledge, it is used as a synonym for the activity which the organization performs.

However, the strategic intelligence activities are quite old Government or State practices, which some managed to master better than others. For example, in the ancient world, the Carthaginians were especially skilled in developing intelligence on their adversaries, as were their forbearers, the Phoenicians, and other trading states of the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

In the 15th Century, the Italian city-states started to establish permanent embassies in foreign capitals. The Venetians used such outposts as intelligence sources, and even developed codes and ciphers by which information could be secretly communicated¹⁸.

In the 16th Century's Europe, these activities were guided towards specific target groups, like political dissidents or religious groups.

In the 17th and 18th Centuries the governments started practicing such strategic intelligence activities in an attempt to approach global issues in a more systematic manner.

In the 19th and 20th Centuries major shifts are taking place in modern power politics and intelligence systems. National intelligence systems are forced to categorize intelligence, which is classified in three categories: *strategic* (sometimes called *national*), *tactical*, and *counterintelligence*.

Strategic Intelligence became the broadest category, on the one hand because of European state powers promoting world and regional politics, characterized by the pursuit of imperialist foreign policies, and, on the other hand, because of the advances of the military and communication technologies.

Kent's vision on strategic intelligence has some of its origins in the geo-strategic environment of that time, when:

because of the peculiar nature of the Cold War, American leaders would have to learn the skills necessary for protecting US interests in situations short of war but also

¹⁸ *Encyclopedia Britannica – A Brief History of Intelligence*, www.britannica.com

short of true peace. A key requirement for American security in this new era, wrote Kent, was *strategic intelligence*.¹⁹

It is important to point out two of the main characteristics of Kent's strategic intelligence works. First, from a scientific point of view, the American intelligence specialist perceived strategic intelligence as a *social science*. Second, from a functional point of view, he elaborated a comprehensive concept to enhance the American national power, and support the American world policy.

Kent saw strategic intelligence as a social science applied to the existence and prosperity of the Nation-State. He also strove to turn intelligence analysis into a rigorous science: "we insist, and have insisted for generations, that truth is to be approached, if not attained, through research guided by a systematic method. In the social sciences, which very largely constitute the subject matter of strategic intelligence, there is such a method. It is not the same method but it is a method nonetheless."²⁰ The idea that analysts should use some variation of the scientific method to create intelligence analysis is crucial throughout all of Kent's work.

Even though we are now witnessing a shift of paradigm in the intelligence process, which changed in the last decade from a linear structure to a star-shaped one (the *centric-network* intelligence), Kent's vision on the methodology of the information processing that are approximating the scientific method are still in place.

At the same time, Kent's intelligence work was refined by other specialists during the last decades. As the intelligence writer Washington Platt noted in 1957: "The so-called 'scientific method' means different things to different people, but the basic features are much the same. These features are: collection of data, formation of hypothesis, testing the hypothesis, and drawing conclusions based on the foregoing, which can be used as reliable sources of prediction."²¹

The second characteristic is related to the Nation-State's intelligence, which was seen "to the depth and breadth of its being".

To us, this vision is not unknown. The Romanian sociologist Dimitrie Gusti wrote some ten years before Kent about the meaning of Nation's Science, and about the Sociology of the Nation and the War. The main difference between the two visions is that Kent's was an offensive conception, while Gusti's was essentially defensive in its nature.

Kent stressed out that strategic intelligence should have two uses: a protective one and an outgoing one, both of which should play a supportive role

¹⁹ BRUCE BERKOVITZ and ALLAN GOODMAN, *Strategic Intelligence for American National Security*, Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 3.

²⁰ SHERMAN KENT, *op.cit.*, p. 156.

²¹ WASHINGTON PLATT, *Strategic Intelligence Production: Basic Principles*, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1957, p. 75.

in any confrontation between Nation-States, at peace and at war. He embedded strategic intelligence in a conceptual framework providing better evaluative measures of foreign countries which are likely to become potential competitors. The purpose of this framework was to direct the American “peacetime policy toward maintenance of peace and national security”, and for “remembering that we might be thrust into a war which we must win”²².

Strategic intelligence is applied to the discovery of what Kent called a *Nation’s strategic stature*, that is, not just the means the Nation possess to wage war, but also its potential for war:

- the resources that are available, or might be made available (population, industrial plants, transportation network);
- the political and social structure, their stability, and “the moral quality of the people and their strengths of values”, their willingness to be mobilized for war and the reasons for which they would fight;
- the political leadership, their strength and “genius (or want of it) for organizing men and materials into a community of life and strength”²³.

In thinking about intelligence, Kent had an outstanding vision compared to all other previous intelligence attempts because he actually links strategy to intelligence to national power. In other words, his contribution consists in applying thinking about strategy and national power to an ordered conception of intelligence analysis as an intellectual discipline²⁴. The outcome of this conception was the exceptional evolution of the American intelligence establishment for the next fifty years.

“The Need for Intelligence Literature”

The Need for Intelligence Literature is the title of a paper Kent wrote in 1955, and the second important trend eventually set by his efforts in the development of the intelligence structures. Reading this article, I was astonished both by its simplicity and by the depth of the truth it establishes. I felt this especially since I positively perceived all these obstacles, and at the same time potential opportunities for the development of the intelligence field, during the last decade, while I worked as a defense intelligence officer.

²² SHERMAN KENT, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

²³ HS/HC-7 CIA Progress Report; Office of National Estimates (ONE) Section I “Intelligence and the Problem of National Foreign Policy”, 26 December 1951, p. 2 (This document has not yet been declassified) – from “Introduction” to *Sherman Kent and the Board of National Estimates, Collected Essays*, www.odci.gov/csi/books/shermankent/toc.html

²⁴ In “Introduction” to *Sherman Kent and the Board of National Estimates, Collected Essays*, www.odci.gov/csi/books/shermankent/toc.html

Any discipline without literature risks to cease growing and fail to accomplish its objectives. To Kent, this was a matter of greatest importance:

As long as this discipline lacks a literature, its method, its vocabulary, its body of doctrine, and even its fundamental theory run the risk of never reaching full maturity. I will not say that you cannot have a discipline without a literature, but I will assert that you are unlikely to have a robust and growing discipline without one.²⁵

That's why Kent's merit in this area is twofold. On the one hand he noticed this necessity inside the American intelligence establishment, and, on the other hand, he was one of its proponents during the Cold War. In this respect, Ford underlines:

in a more profound sense, the idea of *Studies in Intelligence* did not of course suddenly strike Sherm out of the blue, one Sunday in 1953, but sprang from a long and intensely held conviction that intelligence should be recognized and treated as a scholarly discipline, and to that end *intelligence badly needed a professional literature*²⁶.

Kent fought to impose intelligence as a distinctive discipline and to enhance the intellectual and theoretical bases demanded by the intelligence as a profession.

One Sunday in December 1953, when he had the morning duty in Mr. Dulles's office, Kent wrote a memorandum about how a major flaw in the intelligence business (its lack of a systematic literature) might be corrected. Every intelligence agency has hundreds or thousands of specialists and expert personnel, but very few of them are actually able to find, discover, and encapsulate in writing the values that might enhance the intelligence work, that is, the variables and parameters that might be analyzed and improved in the intelligence field. In any intelligence agency these people are sometimes simply not discovered. Sometimes, tidy-minded leaders and domestic rivalries stupidly ignore them. Kent was definitely one of these people, and he not only worked in the intelligence analysis field, but he had the eye, brain and analytic scrutiny for enhancing intelligence discipline and transforming it to a honorable and special profession. His memorandum is simple but exceptionally loaded with values. It is somewhat outdated today, but it is still true for every Nation-State, and especially for those Nation-States that are evolving towards democracy. He wrote:

what I am talking about is a literature dedicated to the analysis of our many-sided calling, and produced by its most knowledgeable devotees. The sort of literature I am talking about is of the nature of house organ literature, but much more. You might call it the institutional mind and memory of our discipline. When such a literature is produced, it does many things to advance the task.²⁷

²⁵ SHERMAN KENT, *The Need for Intelligence Literature*, www.odci.gov/csi/books/shermankent/toc.html

²⁶ HAROLD P. FORD, *op.cit.*

²⁷ SHERMAN KENT, *The Need for Intelligence Literature*.

Kent's prewar academic experience was the main factor in his developing of the American intelligence literature and research area. His view was clear: any discipline without research cannot be developed, and intelligence, like many other disciplines, such as chemistry, or medicine, or economics, needs the accumulation of empirical knowledge and methodological experience from one generation to the next²⁸.

His proposal to establish an organization as an intelligence research institute was never fulfilled, but in 1975 the Center for the Study of Intelligence was founded, inspired at least in part by Kent's concept of an Institute for the Advanced Study of Intelligence. Besides, in 1998 the Central Intelligence Agency created the Sherman Kent School for Intelligence Analysis, in order to increase the expertise of intelligence officers within its Directorate of Intelligence, responsible for the production of finished intelligence analysis. I mentioned the timeline of the evolution of these institutions in order to outline Kent's vision about this special field. Even though his proposal for a research institute has not become reality in the 50's, the idea was proved to be correct in the next decades. In fact, the establishment of the research culture in the intelligence field is the result of the efforts in the late 40's and 50's of this visionary man.

The importance of Kent's work for the intelligence communities of the new democratic societies

Why is Kent's work so important to the new intelligence communities?

Any intelligence specialist or politician reading Kent's book will most certainly find lots of theoretical and practical ideas for their activity. I shall point out only two of them.

First, there is the value of the concepts. This is probably a most important point. Every discipline works with concepts which have to be the same for all of its specialists. The vagueness or absence of definitions of the concepts can lead to flawed approaches to knowledge, organization, and actions. The lack of professional culture in any field leads to the lack of good organizations and actions. We cannot build a strong culture without designing an intelligence doctrine and theory related to the 21st Century environment. Towards this goal, we need to understand the difference between *information* and *intelligence*, because we have a big problem in this area: the absence of the word "intelligence" from the Romanian vocabulary. In my opinion, a superficial approach to this field from the theoretical point of view stands little chance to lead us to the right direction.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

It is astonishing that the specialists who discovered this anomaly came from outside the intelligence community²⁹. I'm not claiming that nobody has noticed this negative situation from inside the intelligence community. But the Romanian intelligence specialists haven't written about that issue for more than a decade. To the Romanian specialists, any process performed by special services has data and information as input, and also information as output. This theory is simply amazing. I do believe that something has to be rethought here.

I also believe that gaps in a language can lead to a lack of progress in the disciplines where concepts are lacking. During the last decade for example, some concepts were missing in the economics field. Thanks to the open-mindedness of the academic community however, words like *management* and *marketing* have been adapted to the Romanian vocabulary. In contrast, the Romanian intelligence community was not able to enhance their knowledge by adapting any new concept, mainly because of their obsession with secrecy. This problem is not specific to us; rather, it is specific to secret services in general. The difference is that some of these organizations are adapting their knowledge searches faster than others. As noted by Kent himself, there are big differences between academic and intelligence organizations in the knowledge field:

... many of the most important contributions to this literature need not be classified at all.

The plain fact is that 'security' and the advance of knowledge are in fundamental conflict. The only reason we get anywhere is because we do not demand either perfect security or unlimited debate about secrets of state. We do get somewhere because the necessity for compromise at both ends is well and fully understood.³⁰

Second point is the understanding of the meaning of intelligence, and the huge potential of designing a benchmarking process from a theoretical point of view. In the development of the new intelligence communities, the specialists were easily led to a new approach, by defining a clear status of intelligence. This consists in answering a few questions: what are the targets, range of interest to be served, function to be served, and departments and agencies concerned, beside of either positive intelligence or security intelligence.

Kent's model can support the new democratic states in analyzing and taking general decisions regarding: (1) which of the intelligence functions³¹ should be implemented, and how much of the country's resources should be

²⁹ From outside the intelligence environment it is Dan Pavel who has written about this subject. He is professor at the Political Science Faculty – University of Bucharest.

³⁰ SHERMAN KENT, *The Need for Intelligence Literature*.

³¹ The four elements of intelligence are clandestine collection, analysis and estimates, covert action and counterintelligence – GLENN P. HASTEDT, *Controlling Intelligence*, Frank Cass, London, 1991, p. 6.

allocated to that purpose; (2) the balance between civilian and military intelligence organizations; (3) the relationship between intelligence and policy (of course, this also involves the issue of coordination among the intelligence organizations)³².

Closing remarks

More than five decades since their publishing, Kent's works are still valuable, especially to the Nation-States lacking a mature institutional memory, doctrine, and theory in the intelligence field.

I felt that it is important to write about Kent because the new challenges in the international defense and security environment require new approaches to the intelligence discipline. These challenges can be addressed only by a strong and mature discipline based on strong and mature doctrinal and theoretic foundations.

This is why Kent's work on intelligence may stand as a model, as roots for a new approach to intelligence, but on the same pattern in principles. We have to adapt this intelligence pattern to our needs taking into account the new paradigmatic shifts.

Also, we have been witnessing important changes in the intelligence process and organization, and we have to adapt our intelligence strategy to them. These are in fact the three levels found by Kent in his book, and they are still viable today: intelligence is knowledge, intelligence is organization, and intelligence is activity.

³² The reader could find these three aspects elaborated by THOMAS C. BRUNEAU, "Controlling Intelligence in New Democracies", in *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 14, 3, 2001.